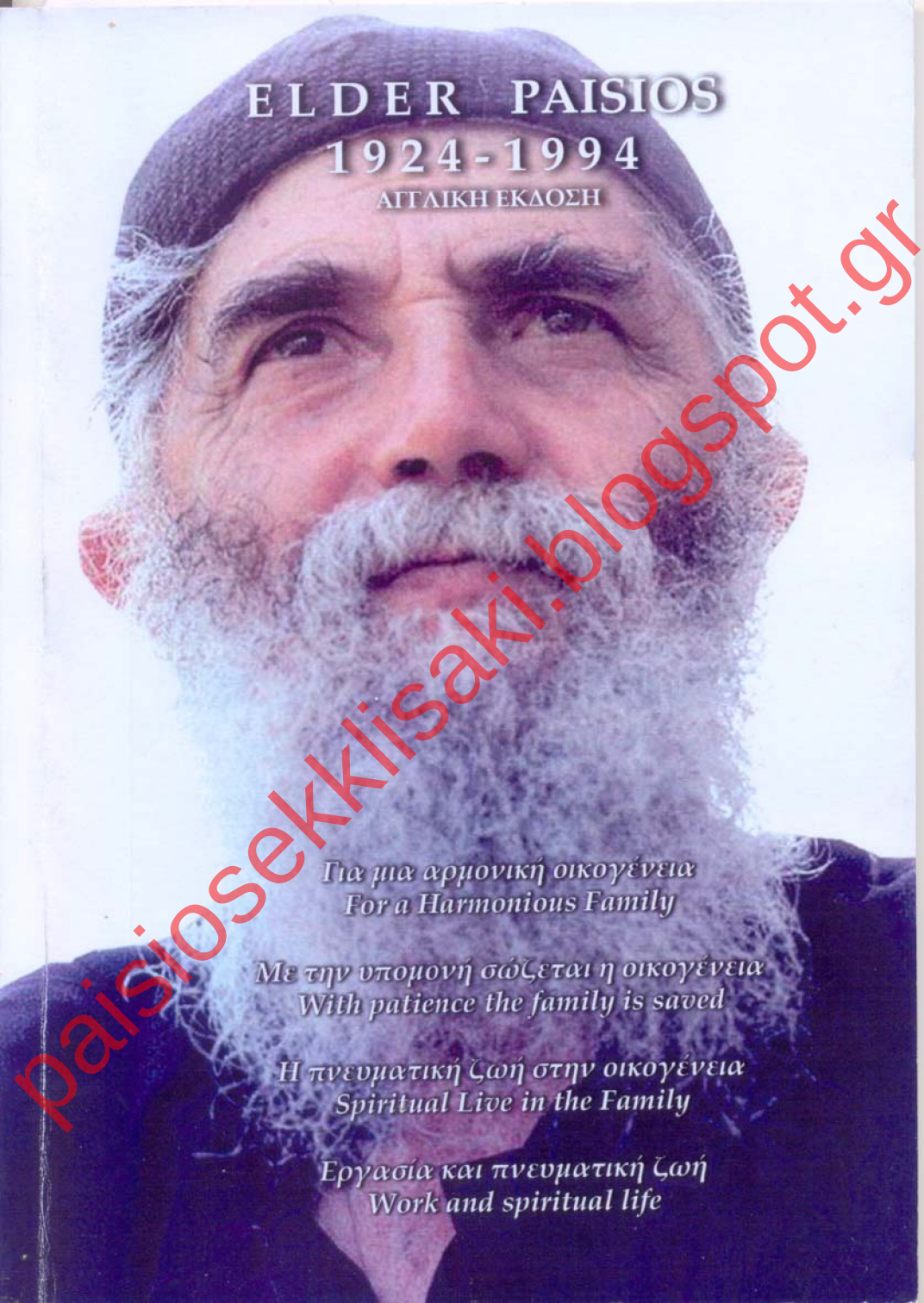
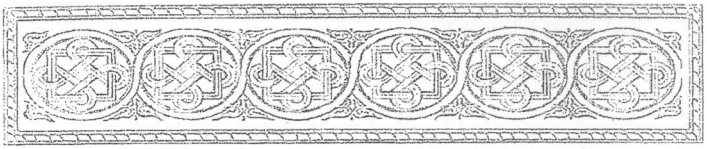


paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

ΑΓΓΛΙΚΑ



MAYROKEFALOS ANESTIS
MOB:. 6955318555
ALEXANDROUPOLIS

CHAPTER ONE

Για μια αρμονική οικογένεια

For a Harmonious Family

CHAPTER TWO

Με την υπομονή σώζεται η οικογένεια

With Patience the Family is Saved

CHAPTER ONE

Η πνευματική ζωή στην οικογένεια

Spiritual Life in the Family

CHAPTER TWO

Εργασία και πνευματική ζωή

Work and Spiritual Life

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PAISIOS

Paisios used to be one of the most enlightened Saint figures in our Church, the last decades. He was born in Pharasa of Cappadocia, in the middle east, on 25 July in 1924 and was baptized and named after Arsenios. His Parents, Prodromos and Evlampia Eznepide, were very devout and had ten children while Arsenios had nine siblings. Arsenios even from his infancy, received the blessing from God to be baptized by a Saint who lived in his area, the Saint Arsenios from Cappadocia. Saint Arsenios predicted the future holiness of the child, he asked his Godmother to name after him Arsenios, telling her distinctively that he wanted a monk to be in his stead, namely to have his name. Almost a month after Arsenios' baptism his family followed the road to Greece where he finally stayed in Konitsa. Arsenios since he was a child had a huge love for Christ and our Virgin Mary and he had a strong desire to be a monk. He loved going to the forest holding a wooden cross, he used to pray. At the age of 21 he joined the army, where he excelled in moral and courage. He always asked to go to the front line and to the most dangerous positions, he wished his own death instead of someone's else death. Many times he run the risk of being killed in order to save somebody else, a comrade-in-arms. When he did his military service he went to the Holy Mountain to become a monk. In 1954 he took monastic vows and was named after Averkios, and later on Paisios. He was a monk in the Monastery Esphigmenou and later on in the Monastery Philotheou. As a monk he had an exemplary obedience while he was trying to help the other monks whenever and however he could. From 1958 to 1964 Father Paisios is not in the Holy Mountain, initially in the area of konitsa where he will support thousands of souls and he will help them to escape from the fallacy of the heretic, while later he goes to the isolated and rough Sina, to Saints' Galactionos and Epistimis. In 1964 he returns to the Holy Mountain. His Elder Father Tihonas, many times during Divine service he saw as he himself confessed, the Herouvim and Seraphеim to glorify God. The Elder lived for a short time in the skete of Iviron and Katounakia. After the death of his Elder in 1968 he succeeded him in the cell of The Holy Cross. In conclusion, in 1979 he settled down in the Koutloumousiano cell <<Panagouda>>. Little by little his Holy Figure begins to become known to most pilgrims. The whole day, from east til west, he give advices, consoles, banish care, fill your soul with faith, hope and love for God, while at night he reads letters in tens which people sent them every day and prays to God, being sleepless for people who asked his help.

We heard that the Elder Porfirios (Malakasa), in his great mortification had said the following, for the Elder Paisios: f. Paisios' Grace has greater worth because he acquired it by a hard-fought struggle, while God gave it to me as a gift when I was young in order to help people in need...Saints like f. Paisios are sent to earth by God every 400 years!!!...

In the Holly mountain he led an ascetic's life and he spent there the most years of his life. The gifts that God embellished him with are many. He had the gift of healing (he cured a lot of people of a variety of illnesses, cancers, paralytics from birth and more.), he had the gift of against evil spirits (he cured many, exorcising evil spirits from people who were given a rough time) , he had the gift of prediction (he said to many people facts that will happen in the future in a personal level but he also prophesied of future events of our country to come) , he had the gift of far-sightedness (he knew someone's heart deeply and purely than the man himself, that's why he gave advices to a nicety and properly and everyone listened to the word he needed to hear), he had the gift of distinction in spirits (he knew to a nicety if a spiritual occurrence was by God or by evil that tried to deceive and mislead), he had distinction(he knew in any case which one was God's will and if he had to reveal it or not. He knew which one was good, right in any case. Even for non spiritual matters).

He had the gift of divinity. From many spiritual experiences he had with Saints, with Angels, with Virgin Mary but also with visions of the unbuilt light, in fact, he became a theologian and knew deeply the Sacraments of God.

These gifts and above all the elder's love, brought people close to him. Hundreds of people visited him in his cell every day. Endless comings and goings. The elder took the pain, the anxiety and the problems from people and gave them back a solution, joy and peace. Wherever it was worthy-he knew and God where and when-intervened miraculously, under God's rule, and solved the unsolved.

The elder Paisios was a gift by God to people. All this reputation was spread by word of mouth, by people who were surprised by his many

paisiosmkisaki.blogspot.gr

kindnesses and his wonders... The Elder Paisios was brought out by God Himself.

Thousands were the letters which were sent. The Elder said:<<...or psychological problems or cancer or separated family...one of these three will be the problems...these problems give people a rough time...these kind of things they write to me>>. The Elder felt pain either in person or through letters and took it up self-sacrificed willingly... his heart went out to other people because he loved them. He didn't want and couldn't keep himself aloof when other people suffered. If it was possible he took up people's cross on his shoulder, in order to release them from their cross.

The Elder, while he was curing other people, he didn't asked God to cure him...He wanted to be patient with illnesses. << to make some spiritual money for the old age>> he said amusingly.

The Elder had many illnesses and endured them with bravery and fighting spirit. He felt contempt for pain and laughed at it!...

In 12 July 1994 The Elder Paisios consign his Holy soul peacefully and humbly to The Lord, Who loved so much and served Him since he was young. He was buried in the yard of the hermitage of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti of Thessaloniki.

After his death, The Elder Paisios continues to do wonders. We hope to become known the miraculous events that happened and continue to happen after his death, to glorify God and the faithful to gain advantage from it, but also for the mistrustful who see the words of God to be fulfilled two thousand years ago:<<Whoever believes in me won't die>> and <<Whoever believes in me, ……..>>.

So, The elder as faithful servant of Christ, didn't die but lives and does wonders!
May we all have his blessings!

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

CHAPTER ONE

Για μια αρμονική οικογένεια

For a Harmonious Family

The good start of family life

Geronda, a young man who has chosen married life asked me how he should make a good start in it.

– First of all, he must take care to find a good wife who will comfort him internally, for every person is comforted differently and by a different person. He should not expect that she be wealthy and beautiful, but that she be above all simple and humble. He should pay careful attention to her inner beauty rather than her external beauty. When the young woman is a positive and wholesome person endowed with the manly virtues of courage and strength, without too much feminine character, this will be helpful to their compatibility, as the man will come easily to an understanding with her without many headaches. If she also has the fear of God, if she has humility, then they can both go hand in hand to cross over the bad current in the world.

If a young man is thinking seriously about a young lady becoming his wife, I think it is better if he first makes

this known to her parents through some related person, and then meet with them and their daughter. Afterwards, if they give a promise and become engaged – and it's good if the duration of the engagement is not overly extended – he should try during the period of engagement to see his fiancée as a sister and respect her. If they both struggle, with *philotimo*, to preserve their virginity, then at the Sacrament of Marriage, when they are crowned by the priest, they will receive an abundance of the Grace of God. For as Saint John Chrysostom says, "*the crowns are symbols of victory over bodily pleasure.*"[1]

Following this, they should cultivate, as far as possible, the virtue of love, so the two of them will always remain united in such a way that the Third Person – our sweetest Lord Jesus Christ – will also remain with them. In the beginning, naturally, as they get to know each other well and become settled in their family life, they may encounter some difficulties. This happens with every beginning. Just the other day, I saw a tiny, little bird. It had just flown out of the nest to find its own food, and was just a few inches off the ground. It didn't know how to easily catch the insects, and it struggled for quite some time. As I was watching it, I thought to myself how difficult every start is. The young graduate student, after receiving his degree and getting a job, will face some difficulties in the beginning. The novice monk also faces hardships during his early days at the monastery. The young man, when he marries, will also encounter some difficulties.

1. "*Crowns are placed on the heads (of the spouses) as a symbol of victory for by prevailing and not being won over by sensual pleasure, they thus approach their marriage bed.*" (Saint John Chrysostom, *Commentary on 1 Timothy*, Homily 9, PG 62, 546).

– Geronda, does it matter if the wife is older than the husband?

– There is no rule of the Church which says that if a young woman is two or three or even five years older than the man that they ought not to marry.

The harmony of God is hidden within the differences in character

One day a person came to my *Kalyvi* and told me that he is very upset because he does not agree with his wife. But I noticed that there was nothing serious between them. He had a "bulge", and his wife had another "bulge"; and so they couldn't get near each other. They just needed a little planing to smooth out their differences. Take, for example, two rough, unplaned wooden boards. One has some knot at one point, the other another at some other point. It you try to connect them, they will have some empty space between them. But if you plane one down here and the other a little there, but with the same plane, they come together at once![2]

Some men tell me, "I don't agree with my wife; we are complete opposites! How does God allow for such strange matches? Couldn't He provide so that couples would be compatible and live spiritually?" But I tell them, "Don't you understand that in this very difference of character lies hidden the harmony of God? It is the different characters which create harmony. God forbid

2. The Elder of course is referring to the work done by the Spiritual Father which is effective when the husband and the wife have the same Spiritual Father, so that the spiritual planing is done "*with the same plane.*"

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

that you should be the same in character! Think of what would happen if, for example, both of you had a short fuse; you would tear the house down! Or, if both of you were mild in character, you would fall asleep standing up! If you were both stingy, you might have been suited to each other, but you would both go to hell. And, if again, you were both too open-handed, would you be able to maintain your household? You would have destroyed your home, and your children would be running in the streets. If you were both contrary and disagreeable characters, would there ever be anything similar between you? You would kill each other in one day! So, do you see what happens? God provides for one good character to marry another who may be disagreeable in order to be helped; for it may have been that he or she had a disposition to be good but never had the help to become so from an early age."

The little insignificant differences in the characters of spouses help to create a harmonious family, because one completes the other. A car needs the petrol pedal to move, but it also needs the brakes to stop. If the car only had brakes, it would not budge; and if it only had gas, it wouldn't stop. Do you want to know what I told a couple once? "You don't match because you are a match!" They were both very sensitive. If something happens at home, they lose their composure and both start "Oh my God, what's going to happen to us!" says one; "Oh my God, what's going to happen to us!" says the other. In other words, one just makes the other more hopeless. One can't help the other a little by saying, "Wait a minute, this is not as serious as you make it out to be, after all." I have seen this in many married couples.

Even when it comes to raising their children, parents can be more helpful to them when they're different in character. One holds on to the brakes, while the other says, "Let's give the children a little freedom." If they both pressure and restrain the children too much, they will lose them. And if both leave them completely unrestricted, again they will lose them. Through a balance, the children are kept on an even keel.

What I'm saying is that everything is needed. One shouldn't go to extremes, but each husband or wife can help the other in his own way. For example, if you eat something very sweet, you also want something that's a little salty. Let's say that you eat a lot of grapes, but then you also want a bite of cheese, to cut back on the sweetness. Or, if the green vegetables are too bitter, they cannot be eaten, but with a little olive oil, they become delicious. But a little bitterness, as with a little sourness, is very good for you. But, if someone who's sour says, "All of you ought to be sour like me" and another who's bitter says, "All of you ought to be bitter like me," then we just can't get along.

Mutual respect between the spouses

God has created all things in wisdom. He has endowed man with certain virtues and woman with others. He has granted man strength and manliness so that he can manage when things are difficult and so that the woman will submit to his leadership. For if God had also given the woman the same manliness, the family wouldn't thrive.

In Epeirus, people were talking about a woman and how fierce she was! She wore a long white shirt and

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

always carried a large curved sword! The brigands would have her join their bands. Imagine them having a woman in their company! She once travelled on foot for hours to a distant village to obtain a young man and make him husband to her daughter. When he refused to go with her, she grabbed him, carried him on her back and brought him to her village! But these are rare happenings. If you send women to the battlefield, you can be sure that they'll mistake the boy scouts for the enemy – and run away!

Sacred Scripture says, "*For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church.*"[3] God has determined that man should be head of the household. For the woman to be the head instead of the man is disdain for God. God first made Adam and then Eve. And Adam in seeing his wife, Eve said, "*This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.*"[4] The Scripture says that the woman should fear her husband, that is, respect him, and that the husband should love his wife.[5] It is through love that one can have respect. It is through respect that one can have love. What I love, I also respect, and what I respect, I also love. In other words, love and respect are not two different things; they are one and the same.

People, however, depart from this harmony of God and do not understand what the Gospel says. The husband misinterprets what the Gospel really says, and commands his wife: "You must fear me." But, if she feared you, she would not have married you! There are also some women who say, "Why must the wife fear the husband? I don't

3. Eph 5:23.
4. Gen 2:23.
5. Eph 5:33. The original Greek text reads: "*Let the wife see that she fears her husband*".

accept that. What kind of religion is this? There is no equality." But do you see what the Sacred Scripture says? "*The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.*"[6] Fear of God is clearly respect for God, devotion and spiritual reserve. Such fear of God makes one stand in awe before Him; it is something sacred.

The equality sought by women can only be applied up to a certain point. Nowadays, women mistakenly believe that they're equal to men because they're working in all areas of society; they vote and take an active part in public life. Of course, their souls are equal. But when a husband doesn't love his wife, and a wife doesn't respect her husband, ugly scenes will take place in the family. In the old days, it was very grave for a wife to talk back to her husband. Nowadays a rather careless spirit has entered into the spousal relationship. How simple and beautiful it was back then! I knew a couple where the husband was very short and the wife was strong and quite tall. She could unload 500 pounds of wheat from the wagon all by herself. One time when one of the field workers – a tall man himself – tried to tease her, she grabbed him and tossed him like a matchstick! But you should have seen what tender respect and obedience she had for her husband! This is the only way to hold a family together.

Love between the spouses

– Mother Abbess did you write best wishes to Demetrios who is getting married?

– Yes, Geronda, I did.

6. Pr 1:7.

palisoseklisaki.blogspot.gr

– Bring me the card so I can include a prayer for them: "May Christ and *Panaghia* be with you both. To you Demetrios, I give you my blessing to quarrel with everyone, except Maria. And I give the same blessing to Maria!" I wonder now, will they understand what I mean?

Someone asked me, "Geronda, what is it that most unites husband and wife?" "Gratitude," I answered. They love each other for what they give as a gift to one another. The wife offers her husband trust, devotion, obedience. The husband offers his wife assurance and security that he can protect her. The wife is the noble lady of the household, but also the mature servant. The husband is the captain of the household, but also the lowest labourer.

Couples should have a purified love for one another, so that they can experience the mutual consolation needed to carry out their spiritual obligations. In order to live harmoniously, couples need from the very start to set their love as the foundation of their life, a true and genuine love, one that is found in spiritual nobility, in sacrifice, and not in fake, worldly and carnal love. If there is love, if there is sacrifice, one will always arrive at the standpoint of the other, understand the other, have compassion for the other. And when we take our neighbour into our suffering heart, then we take Christ Himself into our heart, and He fills us with His ineffable exultation.

When there's love, even if one is required to be far away from the other in certain circumstances, they will still be close because the love of Christ cannot be separated by distance. But if, God forbid, there is no love, the two may be physically close, but in reality are miles apart. This is why they must always strive to preserve

their love throughout their life; they should sacrifice themselves for each other.

Carnal love unites worldly people externally only as long as there are worldly attributes present; and it separates them when these attributes are gone and, in turn, drives them to a sense of loss. When there is spiritual, true love between a couple, and if one spouse loses his or her worldly attributes, not only will this not separate them, but it will unite them all the more. When only carnal love is present, then, for example, if the wife learns that her partner has looked at another woman, she will angrily throw some vitriol and blind him. Whereas, if there is pure and true love, she will have all the more compassion for him and try, in a good way, to lead him to what is right. This is how the Grace of God abides in them.

One time a Greek-American doctor came to my *Kalyvi*. Noticing that his face was bright, I asked discreetly about his life. "Father," he told me, "I am Orthodox, but until recently I didn't keep the fasts, nor did I go to Church frequently. One night I had kneeled in my room to pray to God about something that concerned me, and the room suddenly filled with a pleasant and sweet light. For a while I couldn't see anything but this light, and I felt an inexpressible peace within me." I marvelled, realising that this man had been made worthy to see the Uncreated Light, and I asked him to tell me what had preceded this. "Father," he went on, "I'm married and have three children. We had a good family in the beginning. But later on my wife didn't want to stay home with the children; she wanted us to go out with her friends. I went along with her wishes. After some time she said that she wanted to go out with her friends alone, without

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

me. I accepted this, too, and stayed home with the children. Later, she didn't want us to go on vacation together and asked for money to go by herself. Finally, she asked for a separate apartment to live alone. This, too, I did for her; but she had her friends over all the time. During this entire time, I tried to help her through various means, by caring for her, loving her and giving her advice; I tried to make her think of the children who missed her, but she remained unmoved. In the end, she took a great deal of money from me and disappeared. I searched and asked for her everywhere, but it was in vain. I had completely lost track of her. One day, I learned that she had come to Greece and was living in a house of ill repute. I just can't describe how upset I was by her sorry state. In my utter grief, I knelt down to pray. 'My Lord,' I said, 'please help me find her and do whatever I can to help her not to lose her soul. I can no longer bear to think of her utterly fallen state of being.' It was then that the light flooded my room and my heart was filled with peace." "My brother," I told him, "God took notice of your patience, your forgiving spirit and your love, and brought you consolation in this manner."

This is why I often say that it is the devout lay people who will. us. Do you see? A doctor in America, with such a wife, living under those conditions, in such an environment, and yet he was made worthy of such a consolation!

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

CHAPTER TWO

Με την υπομονή σώζεται η οικογένεια

With Patience the Family is Saved

"How is your sister? How is she getting along with her husband?

– Geronda, I hear that she is having difficulties, but she is patient and, when it is necessary, she takes the lead.

– That's how it is. When two oxen are under the yoke and one of them is a little weaker or lazy, then the other applies greater strength and pulls forward, drawing the weaker one along. You see? People out in the world are working diligently on themselves. But you here (in the monastery) are like princesses. Think of a mother with four children – one is mentally retarded; the other is emotionally disturbed; the third suffers from Cooley's Anaemia; and the fourth is out in the streets at midnight. And she might have even more problems with her husband, depending on what kind of a man he is. She endures all this and so much more without complaining. Even though she is ready to explode, she has no one to speak to because some things in the family just cannot be

spoken about publicly. It may be, for example, that her husband gets up and leaves the house without providing any monetary support for her or the household. She may be short of money; she may be unable to pay the rent and be facing eviction. She may be forced to go and work at wherever she can find; she may be facing all sorts of dangers, yet she still has the fortitude to come and tell me, "Pray for me that I may at least be spared from those dangers!" Or it may be that her husband is a drunk and doesn't work, so she has to clean stairs while he goes to the tavern. He may come home at night drunk and beat her, take her money or even demand the money from her boss himself. Oh, this is martyrdom alright!

And, yes, there are some women who have sins, and their sufferings can be seen as the settlement of a debt, but there are others who have no such sins to settle. For them all this suffering will bring about a clear reward. I know a mother who was an angel, a very good soul, the best behaved child in the family, but she married a very difficult man. Her parents were so misled by him at first! He turned out to be a drunk, a man who had never known discipline as a child. It ran in the family; his father was a drunk, too. The poor woman works as hard as a maid and, when she comes home, he beats her. He takes out a knife and yells at her, "I'm going to kill you!" She lives in constant fear – what martyrdom! She lives a miserable life and she has four children to care for. Her parents got to the point of advising her to divorce him, but she just answered them with: "I'll try to be more patient." And she continues to be patient. Do you understand this? This

is a woman who has never read the *Gerontikon*,[1] never read the *Lives of the Saints*, and yet, she knows how to be patient in adversity. Once I asked her, "Don't the children intervene to help the situation?" "The children are still young; the oldest is only fifteen," she answered. "They'll go to the army and then they'll put him in his place!" In other words, she's prepared to endure his beatings until her children go to the army!

Patience fills a person with Grace

– Geronda, how does one handle an angry person?

– With patience!

– And what if you do not have any?

– Go and buy some; they sell it at the stores! Look, when someone is steaming with anger, no matter what you say, it will come to nothing. It is better to keep quiet and say the Jesus prayer. With prayer, he'll calm down, and you can then communicate with him. You see, even fishermen don't go fishing unless the sea is calm; they wait patiently for the storm to pass.

– Geronda, what makes people so impatient?

– Their abundant ... inner peace! God has hung the salvation of man on the hook of patience. The Gospel says, "*But he that endureth to the end shall be saved.*"[2] This is why He presents hardships and various trials – so that people will develop the virtue of patience.

1. *Gerontikon*: This is a collection of instructive incidents and sayings of monastics and laity from the time of the early Church.

2. Mt 10:22.

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

Patience stems from love. In order to endure the other person, you must feel deep compassion and pain for him. And I see that the family is saved with patience. I have seen beasts turn into lambs. With trust in God, everything evolves normally and spiritually. Once when I was in the Monastery of Stomion, I saw in Konitsa a woman whose face was just full of light. She was the mother of five children. Then I remembered who she was. Her husband was a carpenter, and he often took work together with the skilled carpenter who had once trained me.[3] A single word spoken to him, for example, "Master John, can this be done this way?" was enough to make him very angry. "You're going to show me my work?" he would scowl, and he would break his tools, throwing them, and leave. Since he broke things up like this in strangers' homes, imagine what he did in his own home! Well, this woman was the wife of Master John, the carpenter. No one could stand to be around that man for a single day, yet this woman lived with him for years. She suffered everyday living with him, but she had learned to face everything with kindness and forbearance. Because I knew the situation in their family, I would ask each time I saw her, "How is Master John? Is he working?" "Well, sometimes he works, and sometimes he relaxes a little!" "How are you getting along together in the family?" "Very well, Father!" she would reassure me. And she said it from her heart. She never took into account that he often broke his tools – expensive tools – and that she had to do extra work to get by. Do you see with what patience, with what kindness and with what a noble spirit she faced her many

3. The Elder as a layman had learned the craft of carpentry.

adversities! Nor did she criticise him at all! And for this, God shed His Grace on her, which made her face shine with inner light. She raised her five children to be outstanding individuals and kept the family together.

– How could she justify her husband?

– With just one good thought, "He is my husband; he may say an extra word from time to time. Now, if I were in his place, I might be doing the same thing," she would say. You see, she applied and lived by the Gospel, which was why God would send His Grace. And if lay people like her can practice patience and become filled with Divine Grace, how much more patience should we practice – we who are monastics and have all the presuppositions, all the opportunities for a spiritual life!

As I have come to understand, the greatest scandals, not only in the families but also in the state authority, stem from the most insignificant things. In the family one person must be humble before the other; one must imitate the other's virtues and also be patient and endure the other's peculiar idiosyncrasies. To make this possible, it helps to think of how Christ sacrificed Himself for our sins and that He bears with us all – billions of people – even though He is without sin. However, when we suffer from the idiosyncrasies of the others, we are paying off the debt of our own sins. God in His goodness has arranged things perfectly, so that with our gifts, we can help each other, and with our faults, we can be humbled by each other. For every person has some gifts; but everyone also has some faults which one must struggle to overcome.

I once gave a scolding to someone! But you should see what obedience his wife shows him, even though she

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

herself is a very capable woman. With her, he is a child. With her obedience, she is constantly gathering, storing up Divine Grace, while he, with his egoism, is constantly distancing himself from Divine Grace and becoming empty. In the end, who is the one who truly benefits? You see, the secret is humility. The whole foundation is there – in obedience, humility. If he would only acknowledge his weakness, his fault, and ask for help from God, Divine Grace would come to him as well.

The faith-filled wife

– Geronda, a wife was abandoned by her husband who even took their child, and now has relations with two other women. She has asked me what to do.

– Tell her to be as patient as she can, to pray and to behave with kindness. She should wait; she herself should not break up the marriage. There once was a man who abused his wife, treated her badly, but she faced all this with patience and kindness, until she died rather young. When they exhumed her body, a sweet fragrance issued from the grave. Everyone who was there was surprised and puzzled. You see, she had lived her life with forbearance, and was rewarded in the other life.

There's another case I have in mind: A young worldly fellow fell in love with a girl who was living a spiritual life. In order to make her like him, he started going to church and tried to live a spiritual life. They got married, but years later the husband returned to his worldly life. Even though they had three grown children – one boy in college and two younger girls, one in middle school and one in high school – he continued to live prodigally. He

owned a large company and made lots of money, most of which he squandered with his lavish lifestyle. His poor wife held the home together by being frugal, and kept their children on the right path by giving them love and sound advice. She never spoke badly about their father, as she didn't want to traumatise or influence them. When he came home late at night, she would make up excuses for him, saying that he had work. But in the middle of the day, when he would come home with some girlfriend of his, what excuse could she give then? So what did this godless man – who didn't deserved to be called a human, as he had no humanity about him – do? He would call ahead to his wife and ask her to prepare one of his favourite meals and then show up with one of his girlfriends. The poor mother always received them with kindness, giving the children the impression that the girlfriend was one of her friends and that their father had stopped by her house in order to bring her to theirs for dinner. She would then send the children to their rooms to study, because she feared that they might see something unseemly, as the father did not hesitate to behave inappropriately even in his own home. This happened so frequently with so many different women that the children began to ask their mother, "Mother, how many friends do you have?" "Oh, these are my friends from long ago," she would answer. In the meantime, her husband abused her and treated her worse than a servant.

Just think of that mother and what she had to endure day in and day out, while serving two beasts who dishonoured the home; and still she constantly tried to instil good thoughts in her children. And it wasn't as if she knew that this would soon be over so as to say, "I'll be

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

patient" and find some consolation. This situation went on for many years. But because this deplorable man had given many rights to the devil, it was only to be expected that he would be under terrible demonic influences. He was like a demented man who had no control over himself and found fault in everything around him. One day, as he was driving like a madman, drunk with carnal passion, he lost control of his car and fell into a ditch. The car was totalled, and he was seriously injured. He was transferred to the hospital, and after a long recovery, was brought home, a crippled man. No girlfriend would come near him now for he was no longer rich, and his face was badly deformed. The good wife, however, continued to take care of him, without reminding him of his prodigal past. This moved him profoundly and transformed him spiritually. He sincerely repented, asked to go to Confession, lived a few years in a Christian way with inner peace, and finally, reposed in the Lord. After his death, his son took over the business and provided for his family. The children lived in harmony and love, because they had received a good foundation from their good mother. Now, that mother was a true heroine. She drank all that poison in order to keep the family together and protect the children from becoming bitter. She held the family together correctly; she even saved her husband, and gathered in Heaven a treasure for herself. God will certainly place this woman in the best mansion of Heaven.

Children from broken homes

– Geronda, when the husband has some serious passion, acknowledges his fault, confesses, but is still under the influence of his passion and tells his wife, "I'm causing you and the children a lot of pain; maybe it would be better if I went away so you are no longer troubled by me, and I will send you money from wherever I am," what should the wife do?

– If the husband truly believes what he is saying, this means that he has much *philotimo*, and the wife should try to be patient. But, of course, it's better not to believe what she hears too readily; she ought to look deeper into this. You see, sometimes the husband may say, "I should go away and not trouble you" with an assumed nobility of spirit, but in reality he just wants to go away and be with another woman.

Nowadays, the way it's been degraded, marriage has lost its meaning. Families break up for the slightest reason. Not long ago a completely disoriented man came to the *Kalyvi*. He had fathered two children with a girlfriend. Then he married someone else, had a child with her, and then he divorced her. Then he married another woman who was also divorced and who had two children from her first marriage and a third one with a boyfriend. He had two more children with this wife. As he was relating this information to me, I had to say, "Now, hold on, just how many mothers and how many fathers do these children have?"

This is how these poor children are tormented and driven to destruction. Children who are sensitive and unable to get over the problems (imposed by their parents' lifestyles) fall into despair and some commit suicide. Others turn to alcohol in order to forget their problems, while others get involved with drugs. Where do they find the money? The smallest dose of heroin costs over four

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

thousand drachmas; the larger dose is six or seven thousand.[4] These children are the result of the previous generation's "wild ways". I wonder, too, what will become of the younger children, who are products of the automatic divorce... This past summer a lot of young men who were taking drugs came by the *Kalyvi* to see me, and most of them were from broken homes. It's terrible to see them in such a situation, at the age of twenty-seven, asking for help! And you know, you can spot those from broken homes a mile away. At the *Kalyvi*, I keep the *loukoumia* (Greek jelly-like sweets) easily available. When these youth come, they grab the sweet, then they run to kiss me, and I end up covered in sugar from head to toe! Love and affection have been missing from their lives. For these youth, whether they have parents or not is all the same to them. It makes no difference for them if the father is coming or going; it doesn't matter if he's home or not; for them it's all the same.

"He's wrong; I'm right"

I have noticed that some Spiritual Fathers tell the men who have problems with their wives "Be patient, this is the cross you have to bear. What can we do? You will receive a reward from God." Then they tell the same thing to the wives: "Be patient; you will have a reward from God." In other words, both may be at fault, but the Spiritual Father tells each of them to be patient. Or one of them may be at fault, and the Spiritual Father still tells him to be patient. But now, the one who is indeed at fault

4. This was said in 1990.

is at peace, believing that he is suffering, tolerating the other person, but who is actually the one causing the pain.

A man once came to the *Kalyvi* and told me he had problems with his wife. They were heading for divorce. They couldn't stand to see each other. They were both teachers and had two children. They never ate at home as a family. They ate at separate restaurants after school, and they brought sandwiches home for the children to eat. When the parents returned home, those poor children would rummage through their pockets and bags to see what they had brought home for them to eat. It was a real drama. The father even served as a chanter in church. His wife attended one church and he chanted in another! So he told me, "What can I do, Father, I'm bearing a heavy cross, a very heavy cross. We constantly fight." "Have you gone to your Spiritual Father?" I asked him. "Yes, I have," he replied, "and he told me to be patient, for I'm bearing a heavy cross." So I started on him: "Let's take things from the start and see who's bearing a heavy cross. When you got married, did you argue like this?" "No," he said. "For eight years we loved and cared for each other. I worshiped my wife more than God! But then she changed. She started to complain and became very fussy ..." Can you believe that? He worshiped her more than God! "Come over here," I told him. "You worshiped your wife more than God! Is it your wife's fault, or is it yours that your family is now in this condition? Because of you, God removed His Grace from your wife. And what are you thinking of doing now?" I asked him. "We are probably going to get a divorce," he said. "Have you become involved with another woman?" "Yes, there is someone," he said. "Don't you see that you are really the

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

one at fault? First, you must ask God to forgive you for worshiping your wife more than Him. Then go and ask forgiveness from your wife. Tell her: 'Forgive me; I am at fault for creating the conditions we have at home and for causing the children to suffer.' Then go to Confession, and be sure to worship God as God and to love your wife as your wife, and you'll see, everything will be all right." I think I shook him up a little. He started to cry. He promised that he would follow my advice. He came back after some time had passed and he was very happy. "Thank you, Father, you saved us," he said. "My wife and I and the children are all doing very well now." Do you see? He was the one who was at fault, but he thought he was the one bearing a heavy cross!

You also ought to be careful and not excuse the women who come and complain about their husbands. I don't excuse either of them; instead, I ask them questions and try to get them thinking. Let's say the wife tells me, "My husband drinks, comes home late at night and curses..." "Look," I tell her, "when he comes home late at night drunk, treat him with kindness. Don't start whining and complaining: 'Why are you late? What time is this for you to come home? Will you never change? How long am I supposed put up with you?' And if you keep a long face, you can be sure that the devil will come to tell him, 'You're such a loser for staying with this foolish woman! Why don't you go and party with another?' You may be in the right, but the devil will lead him astray. Now, if you treat him kindly, if you are patient and pray fervently without complaining about what he is doing, he may see a little sunshine; he may come to his senses and correct himself." Then when the husband comes and tells me,

"My wife is whining and shouting at me," I scold him: "Your children and your poor wife anxiously wait up for you until midnight, and you come home drunk and start cursing! Shame on you! Is this why you got married, to torment your wife and your children?"

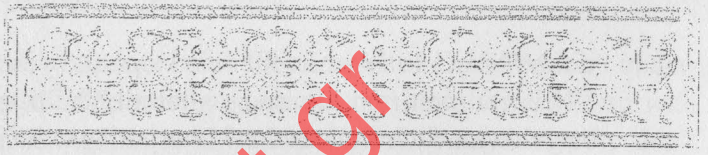
There may be times where both spouses are in the right. Once I was talking to a group about how pure General *Makriyannis*[5] was, for he had both physical and spiritual purity. But then someone interrupted to say, "Don't tell me they are trying to make *Makriyannis* into a saint!" "And why not?" I asked him. "Because he beat his wife," he answered. "Look, let me explain what happened. When *Makriyannis* happened to have an occasional five drachmas and a widow with children came for help, he would give it to her. His wife would then complain: 'Why did you give the money away; you, too, have children'. And he would dismiss her with a slight slap, saying, 'You have your husband who will support you, but that poor woman has no one. Who's going to support her?' In other words, they were both justified."

Also, keep in mind that if one of the two lives spiritually, then he is not in the right, even though he may be. You see, a spiritual person is expected to face an injustice in a spiritual manner. In other words, a spiritual person must face all things with divine justice by looking to see what will benefit the other person. For when one is weak and makes a mistake, then he is somewhat

5. *Yannis Makriyannis* (1797-1864): General in the Greek Revolution of 1821 and a great fighter. Following the independence of the Greek state, he also fought for the granting of a constitution to the Greek people by Otto, the Monarch of Greece. He authored the acclaimed memoirs, known as the Memoirs of *Makriyannis*.

paisiosekkisaki.blogspot.gr

entitled to a little leniency, because there are extenuating circumstances. But when one who is in a better spiritual condition doesn't display any understanding, then he will be at greater fault. What would happen if spiritual people faced things just like everybody else, in a worldly manner, with the worldly, human justice? They would be constantly going to the worldly courts. This is why people are tormented.



CHAPTER ONE

Η πνευματική ζωή στην οικογένεια

Spiritual Life in the Family

The more one grumbles,
the more one falls into ruin

Geronda, why do people grumble and how can it be avoided?

– Grumbling is caused by misery and it can be put aside by doxology (giving praise). Grumbling begets grumbling and doxology begets doxology. When someone doesn't grumble over a problem troubling him, but rather praises God, then the devil gets frustrated and goes off to someone else who grumbles, in order to cause everything to go even worse for him. You see, the more one grumbles, the more one falls into ruin.

Sometimes the devil deceives us and makes us unable to be pleased with anything; however, one can celebrate all things in a spiritual manner, with doxology, and secure God's constant blessing. Look here, I know someone on Mount Athos who, if it's raining and you tell him, "It's raining again," he will start saying, "Yes, it's always raining; we are going to rot from all the humidity." And,

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

if after only a little while the rain stops and you tell him, "Well, it didn't rain too much after all," he'll say, "Yes, but what kind of rain was that? Everything will dry out..." You can't say that he's crazy; it's just that he's grown accustomed to grumbling. It's strange to see a rational man thinking irrationally!

Grumbling carries a curse. It's as if someone is cursing himself, and then the wrath of God comes upon him. I knew two farmers in Epeirus. One of them was a family man who had a couple of small fields and who entrusted everything to God. He worked, as much as he could, without anxiety. He would say, "I'll do as much as I can manage." Occasionally, some of the hay bales would spoil in the rain because he didn't gather them in time, while other bales were scattered by the wind; and yet for all things he would say, "Glory to You, O God!" and everything went well for him. The other farmer had many fields, cows, and so on, but no children. If you asked him, "How are you doing?" he would invariably respond, "Forget about it; don't even ask!" He never said, "Glory to You, O God"; he was always grumbling. And so that you will see – sometimes a cow of his would die; sometimes one thing would happen to him, sometimes something else. He had everything, but he made no progress.

This is why I say that doxology is a great matter. Whether or not we taste the blessings God gives us depends on us. But how are we to taste God's blessings, if He gives us, for example, bananas and we're thinking of whatever better things some ship-owner might be eating? How many people there are who eat only dry bread, but praise God day and night and are nurtured with heavenly sweetness! Such people acquire a spiritual sensitivity and

are acquainted with the caresses of God. We don't understand these things, because our heart is caught up with filth and we are not satisfied with anything. We don't understand that happiness is in eternity and not in vanity.

Let us make God the governor of our life

– Geronda, why is the Kingdom of God in the Gospel likened to a grain of mustard seed, "*which, when it is sown into the earth, is less than all seeds that are in the earth; but when it is sown, it groweth up and becometh greater than all herbs* "?[1]

– The mustard seed is very small, but when it is sown, grows and becomes a great shrub. Even the little birds go and sit on its branches. The word of God is compared to the mustard seed, because from a small, evangelical word, man can grow spiritually and understand the Kingdom of God.

– Geronda, how should one take what is written in Sacred Scripture: "*The Kingdom of God is within you*"?[2]

– Blessed soul, whenever a portion of the joy of Paradise is in our heart, then "*the Kingdom of God is within us*." And the opposite, when we have anxiety, feelings of guilt, then there is a portion of hell within us. It is a great thing for man to be able to experience a portion of the joy of Paradise from this life. It isn't difficult to achieve this; but unfortunately, egoism prevents us from this spiritual magnificence.

1. Mk 4:31-32; Cf. Mt 13:32; Cf. Lk 13:19.
2. Lk 17:21.

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

Man himself can make his life be paradisiacal, if only he would allow God to govern his life as a good Father. Man must have trust in God, have hope in Him for everything he attempts to do and glorify Him for all things. He should not have anxiety. Anxiety brings with it a rift in the soul; it paralyses it. When one is seeking the Kingdom of God, everything else will follow. The Gospel says, "*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you*",[3] but also, "*The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*"[4]

People today have made their lives difficult, because they are not satisfied with a few things, but are constantly chasing after more and more material goods. But those who would like to live a genuine spiritual life must first of all be satisfied with a few things. When their life is simplified, without too many concerns and nuisances, not only will they be liberated from the worldly spirit, they will also have plenty of time available for spiritual things. Otherwise, they will tire themselves out by trying to follow the fashion of the times; they will lose their serenity and will gain only great anxiety.

And I see that people sometimes make a martyrdom out of their lives! Just today as I was coming with someone from Ouranoupolis, he invited me to go by his home for a little visit. He insisted, so I didn't want to disappoint him. As we reached the front door, I saw him take off his shoes and walk carefully on his toes. "Why are you walking like that?" I asked him. "It's nothing, Geronda; I am

3. Mt 6:33.
4. Cf. Mt 11:12.

walking carefully so that I don't ruin the parquet," he said. What can you say? People are tormented for no reason.

Feeling pain for the neighbour helps the family

The more goods people acquire today, the more problems they have. They neither thank God for His benefactions, nor do they take notice of the misfortunes suffered by their fellowmen to offer their charity. They just squander everything they have and don't give a second thought about the other man who doesn't have something to eat. Then, how can the Grace of God come to them? Even if one is a family man, he ought to put something aside for charity. He can tell his family that there's some sick and abandoned person or some poor family out there that needs help. Even if they don't have money to offer, he can say, "Let's give them one of our Christian books; we've got so many of them." By giving to those in need, one does well both for himself and for his family.

The poor, faithful people in Russia are so deprived! I once offered a little box of incense to a Russian priest and said to him, "It's a poor gift." "You call this poor? Our incense is of such bad quality, all it does is make us cough," he said. Even here in Greece, the refugees endure so much! In Chalkidiki I met a refugee, a tile-setter who only made three hundred drachmas per square meter,[5] and he kept saying, "Glory to Thee, O God, for we have bread to eat!" So, when some contractor told me that he himself

5. This was said in 1992, before the euro. Three-hundred drachmas is now equivalent to less than one euro.

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

is burdened by a lot of sins in his line of work, I just told him, "If you would support these refugees and help them out, you would be relieved of your sins. They have no place to stay. Compared to them, you're Onassis!"[6]

In order for us to practice the virtues, God has allowed for some people to be sick, poor, disadvantaged and so forth. Of course, God could take care of the sick and the poor, but then we would be under the illusion that we are virtuous. For instance, we would say that we are merciful when we are not, whereas now our actions reveal our virtues. Glory be to God that there are people who sacrifice themselves to help their fellow human beings. I once met someone who, as soon as he was released from the military, willingly accepted an unjust conviction for a serious crime in order to save a family. He wasn't daunted by the ridicule, nor did he consider his future.

In any case, I notice how God so provides that at least one member of every family has faith and devotion, so the other members are helped as well. I knew a family in Konitsa wherein everyone was just completely indifferent to the Church. Only one daughter stood apart. As soon as she heard the church bell, she would put away her apron, stop whatever she was doing and go to church. Even when the Germans came and the sexton rang the bell for people to evacuate their homes, she would go to church for Vespers! And even though her parents were quite stingy, she was very charitable. Her father, instead of eating a regular meal, would take a dry rusk, dip it in

6. The Elder here refers to Aristotle Onassis (1906-1975), a prominent Greek shipping magnate.

water and eat it. Her mother, too, was very tight-fisted. Even though her children had good jobs and owned property, she would snatch a burning ember from the fireplace, instead of using up a match. She used a tin can as a coffee pot. When the daughter wanted to take something from the house and give it to some poor person – when she could not do it secretly – she would just say to her mother, "Mother, the monk needs this," – knowing that her mother had cared about me when I was at the Stomion Monastery. So, the mother would say, "Sure, go ahead, give it." Only if it was for the monk, did she raise no objection.

Even during the German Occupation, the daughter secretly helped a lot of poor people. She would take wheat out of the family's storage bin, carry it to the mill, grind it into flour and then distribute it to the poor families. One day her mother caught her doing this and she got into a lot of trouble. That's when she prayed, "God, help me find a job so I can give my entire earnings to the poor." Not long afterwards, she was called to work at an institution. O, the joy she felt! And she did keep her vow. She didn't even buy a pair of socks for herself; she gave all her money to charity. Now so many people remember her and say, "May God save you and bless the bones of your parents!" You see, God provided for her mother as well.

The practice of virtue within the family

– Geronda, how can a family man practice virtue?

– God provides opportunities. But a lot of men, while they're asking God to give them opportunities to practice virtue, grumble when they encounter difficulties.

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

For instance, sometimes the Good God, in His infinite love and in order to provide the husband with practice in humility and patience, removes His Grace from the wife, and she becomes cranky, treating her husband badly. This is when the husband ought to thank God and gladly welcome the opportunity he is given to practice virtue and not complain. Or a mother asks God to grant her patience. Let's say she's got the table set for dinner and the little child pulls the tablecloth, spilling everything on the floor. This is as if the child is saying to the mother, "Mom, be patient!"

Generally speaking, the difficulties faced by people nowadays compel those who wish to live spiritually to be vigilant. It's just as when, God forbid, war breaks out and people have to be in a state of alert; those who are attempting to live spiritually have to do the same thing – be on alert. Just look at how difficult it is for the young children who wish to be close to the Church today! In a way, the war waged against them by the horrible environment in which they live helps them to be alert. You see, in times of peace, where there are no difficulties, most people slack off. But that's when they should take advantage of the peace and use it for their spiritual progress; that's when they should try to prune away their shortcomings and cultivate virtues.

Hesychia is very helpful in spiritual life. It's good for one to set aside some part of the day in which to maintain quiet. He should examine himself in order to recognise his passions and struggle to overcome uproot them and thus purify his heart. If, in fact, there is a quiet and isolated room in the house, one reminiscent of a monastic

cell, it would be very helpful. There, "*in secret*",[7] one can carry out his spiritual duties of prayer and study. A little spiritual reading or study, when carried out prior to prayer, is very helpful because the soul is warmed and the mind is transported to the spiritual realm. This is why, when one has many distractions and cares during the day, he should – if he has ten minutes for prayer – give preference to first studying something particularly strong for two minutes, in order to dispel the distractions.

– Geronda, isn't it perhaps too difficult for someone living in the world to do these things?

– No, there are lay people who live very spiritually; some even live like ascetics, with their fasting, their attendance at prayer services, their reciting of the Jesus Prayer, their prostrations, even though they may have children and grandchildren. They go to church on Sunday, receive Holy Communion and then they retreat to their "cell", just like the hermits who gather on Sunday at the *Kyriakon*[8] for public worship, and then return to the peace of their monastic cells. Glory be to God, for there are many such souls in the world. As a matter of fact, I know a family man who continually recites the Jesus Prayer, no matter where he is; he has constant tears in prayer. His prayer became auto-activated and his tears are sweet; they are tears of divine exultation.

I also remember a certain worker – John was his name, there on Mount Athos – who worked very hard; he did the work of two men. I had advised him to say the

7. Mt 6:4.

8. The main church of a *Skete*, in which the ascetics and hermits from the nearby cells gather for common worship on Sundays and other holy days.

paisiosekkisaki.blogspot.gr

Jesus Prayer while he worked; gradually, he became accustomed to it. He came to me once and told me that he felt great joy when he said the prayer. "A serene 'dawn' is breaking," I told him. After some time I learned that he had been killed by two drunks. Oh, I was so saddened! Some days later, a monk was looking for a tool, but couldn't find it because John had put it away somewhere. That night John appeared in the monk's dream and told him where he had put the tool. You see, John had attained such a spiritual state that he was able to help others from the life hereafter.

How simple spiritual life is! If one comes to love God, if one comes to recognise His great sacrifice and His good works, and if one exerts himself, with discernment, in imitation of the saints, he will be quickly sanctified. It is enough that he be humbled, that he be conscious of his own wretchedness and his tremendous ingratitude towards God.

Prayer in the family

– Geronda, should the entire family pray the *Apodeipno* together?

– The older family members should bestir themselves with nobility; they should lead by example. They should read the *Apodeipno* and say to the younger family members, "You can stay with us for a little while, if you want." If the children are somewhat older, they can set up a rule; for example, fifteen minutes for the older children; two to five minutes for the younger children; and after that, as much as they want. If the parents make them stay for the entire *Apodeipno*, they'll just end up resenting it. They

mustn't pressure them, because they haven't yet grasped the power and value of prayer. For example, parents can eat beans and meat; they can eat all types of foods. But when a little child is still only drinking milk, are his parents going tell him to eat meat just because it's more nutritious? It may be nutritious, but the poor child can't digest it. This is why small children are given just a little meat and broth to start out with, so they'll want more.

– Geronda, sometimes adults are so tired in the evening that even they can't pray the *Apodeipno*.

– When they are very tired or sick, they should just pray half of the *Apodeipno* prayers, or at least say the Lord's Prayer. They shouldn't bypass prayer altogether. As in time of war, if at night you find yourself alone on a hill and surrounded by the enemy, you'll fire out an occasional shot to scare the enemy away and keep him at bay. They, too, should let out a shot of prayer to keep the devil away.

Prayer has great value in the family. I know of two brothers who managed through prayer not only to keep their parents from getting divorced, but even turned them into a more loving couple. My own father would tell us, "I don't know what you're going to do, but at least twice a day you must present yourselves before God, so He knows where you are." So, each and every morning and each and every evening we all did our prayers in front of the icons – father, mother and the children – ending with a prostration before the icon of Christ. And when we had some problem in the family, we prayed that it would be solved.

I remember once, when my younger brother got sick, my father said, "Come, let us pray and beseech God to

pateriosekkisaki.blogspot.gr

either heal him or to take him so he will not suffer." We all prayed and he became well again. Even at mealtime we all gathered around the table to pray before we began to eat. If anyone started eating before the meal was blessed, we would say, "He committed fornication." You see, we viewed the lack of restraint to be a form of prostitution. It destroys a family to have each member come home, any time they like, and eat alone without good reason.

The spiritual life of the couple

– Geronda, if a husband doesn't live spiritually, what should his wife do?

– She should entrust him to Christ and pray that his heart be softened. Eventually, little by little, Christ will descend in his heart, and he will start speculating. As soon as his heart is somewhat softened, then she can ask him, for example, to drive her to church. She shouldn't say to him, "Come to church with me," but: "Can you please take me as far as the church?" If he takes her all the way to church, then he might say to himself, "I've come this far; why don't I go inside and light a candle?" In this way, little by little, he may make progress.

– Geronda, can the wife's Spiritual Father also help the husband in some way?

– Sometimes, in order to help the husband, the Spiritual Father needs to help the wife develop her spiritual life. The good will then be transmitted from the wife to the husband and if he has a good heart, God will help him to change.

Women are pious by nature. But once a man, after being somewhat indifferent towards the Church, takes a

"spiritual turn", not even his wife can keep up with him. She may even begin to feel a little envy for not making as much progress as he does. This is why I advise the husbands to be careful in such cases. Because, what happens? As the husband makes spiritual progress, the wife, if she is not also living a spiritual life, may become contrary. If the husband says, "It's getting late; get up; let's go to church," she will tell him, "Go by yourself, don't you see how much housework I have to do?" Or, if the husband says, "Great ... you've kept the oil vigil lamp unlit!" or if he goes to light it himself, she may be offended and start yelling, "What, are you a priest now? Are you a monk?" She may even say, "Why do we bother to light the oil vigil lamp? It would be better if we gave the oil to some poor person." The situation can get to the point of such protestant notions. Naturally, she may regret the excuse she made, but she is also envious of her husband's progress. In these cases, it's a thousand times better to leave the oil vigil lamp unlit than for the husband to light it. So, to keep a family from falling apart, I advise the husbands, "When the right moment comes, tell your wife: 'If I go to church and pray a little and do some prostrations, or if I read some spiritual book, I'm not doing this out of an abundance of devotion, but only as a means of self-restraint, to keep me from being led astray by our wretched society and getting involved with bad company.' " If the husband handles this carefully, then the wife will be happy and may even go on to outdo her husband spiritually. But if he is careless and insensitive, he'll crush her. They might even end up divorcing. If the husband wants to help his wife spiritually, he should try to introduce her to some family that lives a

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

spiritual life with a particularly devout mother and wife, one that she can imitate.

Children and spiritual life

– Geronda, if a mother gives holy water to her child and he spits it out, what should she do?

– She should pray for her child. Maybe it's the way she gives the holy water to the child that's causing a reaction. In order for a child to be on the path of God, his parents must be living a proper spiritual life. Some parents who are religious strive to help their children become good persons, not because they are concerned about the salvation of their souls, but because they just want to have good children. In other words, they tend to be more concerned about what other people will say about their children, instead of whether or not the children might go to hell. But then, how can they expect God to help them? The point is not to force the children to go to church, but to help the children get to know and love the Church. Children shouldn't feel pressured to be good; they should feel a need to be good. The parents' holy life informs the children's souls and they then naturally follow their example. As such, they grow up with devotion and with health of both flesh and spirit, without emotional traumas. If parents, out of fear of God, encourage their children, God helps and the children are helped. But if they do this out of egoism, then God does not help. Many times children suffer because of their parents' pride.

– Geronda, some mothers ask us which prayers a child of three or four years old should say.

– Tell them: "You are the mother; try to find out how much your child can handle." They shouldn't give them a rule.

– Geronda, do you think the children who are brought here for the night vigils get too tired?

– They should let them rest for a little during Orthros, and then bring them inside for the Divine Liturgy.

Mothers should teach their children to pray from an early age, without forcing them. Villagers in Cappadocia lived the ascetic traditions to the fullest. They would go to the ascetic cells (of the saints) where they would do prostrations and pray with tears, and in this way, taught their children to pray. When the Tsetes, Turkish irregulars, would come at night to rob them, they passed by the chapels and heard them crying. They were puzzled. They would say, "What's going on? These people laugh during the day and they cry at night." They couldn't understand what was going on.

Miracles happen with the prayers of little children. Whatever they ask of God, He provides, because they have innocence, and God hears their pure prayer. I remember one time when my parents had gone to the field and left me with my two younger brothers. Suddenly the sky darkened and a torrential rainstorm broke out. We said, "What will become of our parents? How will they get back home?" The two little ones started crying. "Come here," I said to them, "we will pray and ask Jesus to stop the rain." The three of us knelt down before the icons and started praying. In just a few minutes the rain stopped.

With discernment, parents should help their children, from a young age, to draw near to Christ and to experience, from that young age, the higher joys – the spiritual ones.

paisioselkrisaki.blogspot.gr

When they start going to school, they should teach them, little by little, to read spiritual books and help them live spiritually. Then they can become angels and their prayer will have greater boldness before God. Such children are a spiritual investment for the family. Specifically, the *Lives of the Saints* greatly assist children in the spiritual life. When I was little, I would take those little books with the *Lives of the Saints* that were available in those years, and I would go into the woods to study them and to pray. I was flying with joy. From the age of ten to sixteen, when the Greek-Italian War began, I lived a carefree spiritual life. Childhood joys are pure; they leave a lifelong imprint on a person, who will find himself very moved by (the memory of) them when he is older. If children live spiritually, they will live joyfully in this life and rejoice eternally in the presence of Christ in the afterlife.

Relationships with relatives and friends

– Geronda, a woman asked us what she should do about her two cousins who have been living off of her, like parasites, for years.

– What does she want? Should we come up with a new Gospel? God has asked her to help her cousins and He will do whatever is beneficial for their souls.

– Geronda, when there is a misunderstanding among relatives, should someone intervene in order to help them?

– Yes, someone should say something discreetly, because if he keeps silent, he may cause further harm. If by doing this he is misunderstood, he should go once again

to say, "Please forgive me for upsetting you." Following that, he should leave them alone, and pray for them.

If one wishes to live peacefully, he must be especially careful in his relationships with relatives and friends. One mustn't be fooled by the politeness he may encounter. Worldly politeness can be very harmful because it contains hypocrisy. One's external behaviour may simulate the perfect saint, but when his inner self is revealed, it may be the complete opposite.

– Geronda, when someone feels the kindness of another, is it right to acknowledge it?

– It isn't necessary if they're close friends or relatives, because he, too, will have been of assistance to him, being aware of the inner gratitude that exists between them. But if they are not close or related, then, he should express his gratitude in every way possible. To strangers we say, "Thank you." If, let's say, a child wants to express his gratitude to his parents, he should do nothing else but say constantly, day and night, "thank you" for everything his parents are doing for him.

It is very helpful to be simple in our relations with others, to always have good thoughts about them, and to not take everybody too seriously. One should avoid discussions which are presumably held for spiritual improvement, but only bring headaches instead. One shouldn't expect spiritual understanding from people who don't believe in God. It's better if one simply prays for them that God will forgive them and enlighten them. One should speak the language of each person (at that person's level), and not reveal the great truths that he believes and experiences, because they will not understand him, as he speaks on another frequency and a different wavelength.

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

Some people say, "I want others to know Christ like I know Him," and so they act as a teacher to others. But to do this, their life has to be in accordance with what they are teaching. When the lives they lead teach a different Christ and do not correspond with what they say, then they cannot claim to have known Christ. And if one does not have inner, practical experiences, he will be outside the realm of reality and sooner or later, he will be betrayed by his own self. When we approach someone with pain and true love, then this true love of Christ transforms our neighbour. The person who has holiness, no matter where he is, somehow creates an electromagnetic spiritual field around himself and influences those who come within this field. Of course, we must be careful not to squander our love and give our heart away too easily, because many times people will exploit our heart and turn it into ground meat, or at other times, they aren't able to understand us and they misinterpret us.

Temptations on holy feast days

– Geronda, why do temptations often occur on feast days?

– Don't you know? On holy feast days, Jesus Christ, *Panaghia* and the saints are most joyful, treating us with blessings and other spiritual gifts. If parents offer treats when their children celebrate (their nameday) and kings grant amnesty when a new prince is born, why shouldn't the saints also offer treats? In fact, the joy they give is very powerful and very beneficial to the souls. Knowing this, the devil creates temptations in order to deprive people of these divine gifts and prevent them from rejoicing

and benefiting from these feast days. And you can see sometimes when a family is preparing to go to church and receive Holy Communion on a feast day, the evil one will cause them to argue for some reason, and they end up not only not receiving Communion, but also not going to church. The devil will so entangle things that they are deprived of all divine help.

You'll also see this in our own monastic life. Many times, the devil, knowing full well that we will benefit spiritually on a feast day, will create a temptation – spoiler that he is – on that day, or rather from the night before and spoil our entire disposition. For example, he may get us to argue with another Brother and torment us afterwards by breaking our spirit emotionally and physically. Thus, he does not allow us to benefit from the holy feast day through the joyful process of praising God on that day. But the Good God will help us, as He sees that the temptation was caused solely by the envy of the evil one and not provoked by us. And God may help us even more if we humbly reproach ourselves, blaming neither our brother, nor the devil himself who hates every good, for, after all, this is what he does: create scandals and spread evil – whereas man, as the "*image and likeness*" of God, should spread peace and goodness.

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

CHAPTER TWO

Εργασία και πνευματική ζωή

Work and Spiritual Life

Work is a blessing

Geronda, in the old days people used to say, "*Better to wear out your shoes than your blankets.*" What did they mean?

– They meant, "It is better to wear out your shoes by working than to stay in bed and be lazy." Work is a blessing, a gift from God. Work gives vigour to the body and refreshes the mind. If God had not given us work, man would have become mouldy. Those who are diligent continue to work into their old age. If they stop working while they still have strength, they become melancholy; it's like death for them. I remember an elderly man in Konitsa, almost ninety years old, who was constantly working. In the end, he died out on the field, two hours from his home.

Besides, even this bodily comfort, which some people strive for, is not a permanent situation. It is enough to forget their anxiety for that one hour – have their food, their dessert, their bath, their rest. But just as soon as

these things come to an end, they seek some other form of comfort. So, they are constantly distressed because there is always something that they're wanting; they feel an emptiness, and their soul is seeking to fill it. On the other hand, the person who wearies himself from work feels a constant joy, a spiritual joy.

– Geronda, if you have back problems, you just can't do any kind of work.

– True, but doesn't the back need exercise too? Won't work that could be like an exercise for the back help? Listen: If all someone does is eat, drink and sleep, he will start falling apart; he'll feel sleepy all the time because his body and his mind slacken. He'll eventually get to the point where he won't be able to do anything. He gets easily worn out, even by just walking. Instead, if he just works a little and moves about, he strengthens his legs and his arms. You see, those who love work don't sleep much, or from being fatigued – they might not sleep at all. They have all this strength because work has seasoned them and they've become physically strong.

Work is health, particularly for a young person. I have noticed that some pampered young men become tough and hardened once they go to the army. The military does them a lot of good. Of course, in the old days this happened more. Nowadays, they're afraid to push the soldiers, because with a little pushing, they slash their veins; they suffer nervous breakdowns... I tell parents to pay someone who will take their children in to work, in order to promote their health – as long as they are doing something they enjoy. For if a young man who suffers from nerves, and has a good mind as well, does not work, he will become sluggish. And if he sees others making

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

progress, he gets confused because of his egoism and is unable to be happy with anything. He constantly has thoughts going through his head and his mind becomes mere pap. Then the devil goes and tells him, "Loser! What a good-for-nothing you are! So and so became a professor; the other person has his own business and is making money – you, where will you end up?" Thus, he despairs. But, once he begins working, he will acquire confidence in himself, in the good sense of the word. He will come to realise that he can get things done; his mind will be occupied with his work and he will be spared those thoughts. Thus, two good things take place.

Choosing a profession

– Geronda, some parents steer their children into taking after their own profession, and they often get very pushy about it.

– No, they shouldn't do that. Parents mustn't pressure their children into doing what they themselves enjoy, if their children don't enjoy it as well. I once knew a young man who wanted to study theology and become a priest, but his mother wouldn't let him; instead, she forced him to go into medicine. The young man had studied Byzantine music and chanted; he had even made his own musical instrument, and found the tones on his own. He knew Byzantine music by heart. He had a gift. He wrote chants and services. As soon as he finished high school, he took the entrance exams and got accepted to the Theological School. His mother had a nervous breakdown because of her grief. She would come to me and beg me: "Father, pray for me to get well, and I'll let my child do whatever

he wants." But when she did get well, she again refused to let him do what he wanted. Later, he abandoned everything and in the end, he wasted away.

This is what I say to young people who are perplexed about which branch of science to follow: "See which field you like, so as to do that which comes natural to you." Now, if what they're thinking of doing doesn't come naturally to them, I try to help them to give their heart to something that comes naturally to them. In other words, I help them follow the education and training they want, so as to create a profession out of what is within their capabilities – provided they do so in harmony with God. Does someone have a calling for music? He should then become a musician or a good chanter who, through his life and his chanting, will help those who hear him, so that they will come to love the Church and prayer. Does he have a calling for art? He should become a painter or iconographer and with piety, make icons, which will also work miracles. Does he have a calling for a certain science? He should become dedicated to it and work with *philotimo*.

You will see that what affinity someone has is evident from an early age. I once met a man at the Monastery of Stomio in Konitsa with his two nephews. One of them, who was about six or seven years old, sat next to us and kept asking us questions. I asked him, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" "A lawyer!" he said. We couldn't find the other one, so I asked his uncle, "Where did the other one go? We don't want him to get hurt by falling fall off a cliff or something." As we went outside to look for him, we heard banging coming from the wood shop. We went inside and what did we see? He

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

was pounding a hammer into the smooth plank used for planing that was on the work bench, warping it beyond salvage. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I asked him. "A cabinet maker!" he tells me. "May you become one," I told him with a smile, adding, "so you destroyed the plank! It's alright!"

Love of work

– Geronda, why do so many people feel bored at work?

– Maybe it's because they don't love their job, or maybe their work has become too much of a routine. With some jobs – say at a factory where they make doors and window frames – a labourer might be doing the same thing from the time he starts his shift, until the time he leaves: place the glue. Another worker may only apply the glass to the frame; yet another applies the putty to the window frame. They constantly do the same job, one monotonous thing over and over again, and their supervisor is always over their shoulder watching them – not for just one or two days, either. It's always the "same old, same old" to the point of boredom. But it wasn't like that in the old days. Back then a carpenter would be given four walls from the contractors and was expected to present the owner with a finished house and the key. He would have built the floors, the doors and window frames, and would even have set the windows with putty. Afterwards he would have built spiral staircases, turned banisters; after that he would have painted, built the cupboards and the shelves – even the furniture! Even if he didn't do all of it himself, he knew how to do it. In a pinch, a carpenter could even put the tiles on the roof.

A lot of people today are tormented because they don't love what they do for a living. They can't wait until it's time to go. However, when one has zeal for work, and when one cares about the things he makes, the more he works, the more his zeal grows. He is immersed in his work, and when it's time to leave, he asks, "Where did the time go?" He even forgets to eat, to rest; he forgets everything! He may not have eaten, but he is not hungry; he may not have slept, but he is not sleepy and may even rejoice over not needing sleep. It's not that he's suffering from hunger or sleeplessness; for him his work is a feast and he enjoys it.

– Geronda, how is it that of two people who do the same work one is spiritually benefitted by what he does, while the other is spiritually harmed?

– It depends on how each one does the work, and what one has within him. If one works with humility and love, everything will be illumined, full of light and graceful, and he will feel inner repose. But if one has prideful thoughts, imagining that he does the work better than the others, he may have a sense of satisfaction, but it doesn't fill his heart, for his soul doesn't sense it; he has no inner repose.

If one doesn't do his work with love, he gets tired and weary. Such a person, merely by looking at the hill he has to climb in order to finish a job, tires simply because he doesn't love that work. The one who loves his work will go up and down the hill numerous times without realising it. One can be digging in the sun for hours and not get tired simply because he loves what he is doing. But if his heart is not in doing the work, he'll keep stopping, loafing around and complaining, "Oh, it's so hot," he says and he suffers.

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

– Geronda, can a person be so immersed in his career or his work that he neglects his family?

– A person should simply like his work; he shouldn't fall in love with it. If he doesn't love his work, he will be doubly tired – bodily and mentally – such that even bodily rest will be of no benefit because he will be mentally weary. You see, it is this mental weariness which exhausts a person. When someone puts his heart into his work and is happy, he is mentally at rest and his physical tiredness disappears.

I know a general in the army who still does all the work done by soldiers. He has such love for his soldiers; he is like a father to them! He experiences such joy helping them! He does his duty and really enjoys it. Once he set out at midnight from the Evros River to go to Larissa on the Feast Day of Saint Achillios.[1] He wanted to get there in time for the Divine Liturgy, even though he would have been perfectly justified in being late and only attending the special Doxology that would be sung for the Feast Day. But he thought to himself, "I must be there from the start to honour the Saint." He does everything with his heart. The gratification felt by those who do their work with *philotimo* is a good and wholesome gratification. It has been given by God so that His creation will not tire. This is the true rest from tiredness.

Each one must spiritually develop his gift

Each person should develop his gift for the good, because God, in giving it in the first place, has some expectations. The mind, for example, is such a gift of power, but depending on how one uses it, can be used for good or evil. If someone who is very bright uses his mind properly, he may be able to invent things which will help people. But if he doesn't use his mind properly, he might invent, let's say, a way to rob his neighbour.

1. Saint Achillios is the patron Saint of Larissa.

Or, for example, those who create political cartoons for newspapers can present an entire event in one sketch. If this event has something to do with ecclesiastical issues, the sketch could also reveal a complete theological perspective. Since their minds take such sharp turns, if some of these political cartoonists had studied theology, they would have been able to fathom the depths of divine meanings. That is, they could have developed this nimbleness of the mind; they could have sanctified it, and they could have helped themselves and others. But instead, a lot of them do negative work – obscene if they are obscene, ridiculous if they are ridiculous.

In other words, those with some exceptional ability will become either useful or destructive, whereas those who do not have some exceptional ability won't be able to do great good, but at least they also won't be able to do great harm.

Anxiety and work

– Geronda, a lot of people are irritated when they come home from work.

– I advise men to find a church after work, go inside, light a candle and sit quietly for ten to fifteen minutes, or to go and sit in a park and read a small section of the Gospel, so as to wind down a bit and then to go their

palsiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

homes, peaceful and smiling, instead of being irritated and ready to pick a fight. They shouldn't bring their problems at work home with them; they ought to leave them outside.

– But Geronda, some of them are justified, for the responsibility they have at work fills them with anxiety.

– It fills them with anxiety because they don't involve God in their affairs. Even the sluggard who says, "Oh well, God will provide…" is better than they are.

I prefer someone is an employee and do his work well, with *philotimo* – but that he simplify his life, that he restrict himself to the essentials and that he keep his mind free from worry – rather than be a factory owner who constantly whines and moans because he's usually in debt. Pride gets in the way, so he says, "I'll take this much of a loan, so that I can produce this and that, in order to better arrange things for myself…" Then, he finds that he's miscalculated; he goes bankrupt and he has to sell everything, and so forth.

There are also many people who don't put their mind to work; they just get pointlessly tired without having done any work. Then they can't respond to what is expected of them and they get anxious. For example, someone wants to learn a certain trade, but doesn't pay any attention. So, he comes and goes for years on end without making any progress, because he never uses his mind. He has to figure out what he will need for his work and then, go about getting it. Look, when I worked in the world as a carpenter, I realised that I needed a lathe for the furniture I made. What should I have done? Should I have gone to find someone to do the work for me? No, I got myself a lathe and learned how to use it. Next, I saw that I needed

to make spiral staircases. So I sat myself down, called to mind the math and geometry I had learned, and figured out how to make them. If you don't use your mind, you end up tormenting yourself. In other words, what I want to emphasise is that one should put his mind to work, because at work one faces a whole heap of challenges. In this way, he will become a good craftsman and from then on he will know what to do and he will be able to proceed. That's the key. The mind ought to be creative in all matters. Otherwise man remains underdeveloped and wastes his time.

The sanctification of work

Everyone should, by his life and prayers, sanctify his work and be himself sanctified. And, if he is an employer and has responsibilities, he should also help his employees spiritually. If he has a good inner state, he sanctifies his work. For example, when young people go to study under a craftsman to learn a trade, concurrently, they ought to be helped to live spiritually. This will be of benefit not only to the craftsman, but also to his employees and customers, for God will bless his work.

Every profession can be sanctified. For example, a doctor mustn't forget that what helps the most in medicine is the Grace of God. This is why he should strive to become a vessel of Divine Grace. A doctor who is a good Christian, along with being a good scientist, helps the sick with his kindness and his faith, because he encourages them to face their illness with faith. He can say to someone who suffers from a very serious illness: "This

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

is as far as medicine has progressed. From this point on however, there is also God Who works miracles."

Or a teacher should try to instruct with joy and help the children in their spiritual rebirth, something which not all parents are able to do, even if they have a good disposition. While teaching them to read, he can also teach them to be good people. Otherwise, what will be the benefit of knowing how to read? Society needs good people who will do well in whatever profession they choose. A teacher shouldn't only pay attention to whether the students know their lessons well; he should also take into consideration the other good qualities children have, such as piety, kindness and *philotimo*. God's grades don't always agree with those of the teacher's. The D that one child receives might be an A in God's eyes, while an A for another child might be a D to God.

The profession does not make the man

– Geronda, when someone is having a hard time at work, what is to blame?

– Could it be that he doesn't approach his work with good thoughts? If he approaches it rightly, then whatever job he does will be a celebration.

– Geronda, what about the person who is embarrassed because he's doing heavy or disdainful work, for example, he works in construction or washes dishes at a restaurant – how should he put things into perspective?

– If he thinks of Christ and how He washed the feet of His disciples,[2] he will stop worrying. It's as if Christ

2. Cf. Jn 13:4-14.

was saying to us: "You should do likewise." Whether one is washing dishes or digging ditches, he should rejoice. Another person may have to clean out sewers filled with germs because the poor man doesn't have any other work. Is he less of a person? Is he not an image of God? Once there was a family man who cleaned out sewers for a living, and who had attained a great spiritual state. He suffered from tuberculosis and although he had the chance to quit, he didn't want to because he thought, "Why should someone else have to suffer?" He loved the scorned life, and for this, God gave him Grace.

Work does not make the man. I once knew a longshoreman who had raised someone from death. When I was the *Dikaios*[3] at the *Skete* of Iveron, I was visited by a man who was about fifty-five years of age. He came late in the afternoon, and not wanting to disturb the Fathers by knocking, he slept outside.

When the Fathers saw him, they brought him inside and told me about him. "Why didn't you ring the bell so we could let you in and take care of you?" I asked him. "What are you saying, Father, how could I possibly disturb the monks?" he said. I noticed that his face had a certain radiance. I understood that he must live very spiritually. He told me that he was orphaned at a young age when his father died, which was why, when he later married, that he loved his father-in-law so very much. Before going home, he always stopped by his in-laws.

But he was constantly worried because his father-in-law swore a lot. He had pleaded with him many times not to swear, but he only got worse. At one point, his

3. *Dikaios* is the Leader of a *Skete*, who is chosen each year by its Elders.

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

father-in-law became seriously ill. They took him to the hospital, but after a few days, he died. The man was not with him at the hour he gave up his soul because he was unloading a ship. When he arrived at the hospital and found him in the morgue, he prayed with great pain: "My God, I beg Thee to resurrect him that he may repent, and then take him." Right then, the dead man opened his eyes and moved his hands. As soon as they saw this, the personnel who were there ran away. He got his things together and took him home, perfectly well! He lived another five years in repentance and then died. The man said to me, "My Father, I thank God so much for doing me this favour. Who am I that God would grant me such Grace?" He had great simplicity and such humility that it didn't even enter his mind that he had raised someone from the dead. He was completely dissolved by gratitude to God for what had been granted to him.

Many people torment themselves because they do not succeed in being glorified with vain honours or in becoming rich with empty things. They don't realise that such things are not needed in the other life, the true life, nor that they cannot be carried over. There, we can only take our good actions, which having removed us from here (this life), will grant us the necessary passport for our great and eternal journey.

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr

paisiosekklisaki.blogspot.gr